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ASCS BACKGROUND INFORMATION



United States Department
of Agriculture

Agricultural Stabilization and
Conservation Service

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AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION PROGRAM

PROCUREMENT SECTION
CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

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The Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP) is a joint effort by agricultural producers, Federal and State agencies, and other groups to restore and protect the Nation's basic land and water resources, and preserve the environment.

The ACP provides cost-sharing with farmers and ranchers in carrying out conservation and environmental protection practices on agricultural land that result in long-term public benefits.

The ACP is designed to help prevent soil erosion and water pollution by sediments, pesticides, animal wastes, and other materials originating on agricultural land by controlling stormwater runoff; protect and improve productive farm and ranch land; conserve water used in agriculture; preserve and develop wildlife habitat, and generally enhance the rural environment.

Only those practices that significantly contribute to these objectives and that are not required as a condition of receiving assistance through other Federal programs are eligible for cost-share assistance. Practices that are primarily production oriented or that result in significant economic benefits to the farmer and rancher are not eligible for ACP cost-sharing.

SCOPE OF PROGRAM

The ACP is national in scope, and is available for participation by all farmers and ranchers who, through consultation with others in the conservation and environmental field, establish the need for cost-share assistance in solving resource conservation and agricultural pollution problems.

The practices approved for cost-sharing must result in long-term and community-wide benefits, and must be practices that the farmer or rancher would not, or could not be expected to, undertake without financial and technical assistance. Annual, short-term, and long-term contracting arrangements are available.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The ACP is authorized in sections 7 to 15, 16 (a) and 17 of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, approved February 29, 1936, as amended and supplemented by Title X of the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act of 1973. The program's goals and authorities were updated by the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977, and were further modified under the Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for fiscal year 1979. Funds for the program are provided annually through the regular appropriation process.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The ACP is administered by Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASC) State, county and community farmer committees, working under the general direction of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. ASCS State and county offices serve as the focal points for the administration of the ACP. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and the Forest Service (FS), and the State forestry agency are responsible for providing technical program guidance to ASC committees as well as technical assistance to farmers in carrying out conservation practices. The county Cooperative Extension Service provides educational support.

To assure that the program provides effective solutions to local conservation problems, the county ASC committee meets with the county program development group to identify the problems and develop conservation practices designed to solve them. These practices are included by the ASC county committee in the county agricultural conservation program.

The county and community ASC committees work with farmers and ranchers to encourage their adoption of the most needed practices, and assign priorities to designated practices, the highest priorities given to those practices designed to solve the most critical conservation and pollution problems.

The State ASC committee reviews and approves the county program, which must also be approved by the Secretary of Agriculture, before it is implemented.

ACP funds authorized annually by Congress are allocated to the State ASC committee. The Secretary of Agriculture determines the amount of funds each State receives, based on the State's soil and water conservation needs. The State ASC committee allocates the funds to the county ASC committees which allocate the funds to farmers and ranchers. The maximum cost-share limitation for the 1979 ACP is \$3,500 per person. (A person is defined as an individual, group partnership, corporation, or other legal entity owning or operating a farm or ranch.)

Cost-sharing is available under annual agreements or long-term agreements (LTA's). Requests for long-term agreements can be accepted for complete farms for a period of 3 to 10 years, or for a portion of a farm for a period of 3 to 5 years (mini-LTA's).

The Federal Government may share up to 80 percent of the cost to install practices under annual agreements (or at a higher rate if authorized by the Secretary of Agriculture). Under long-term agreements, cost-sharing may range between 50 to 75 percent. The Federal share of the cost depends on the public benefits resulting from the conservation or pollution abatement practice. Before any long-term agreement can be approved, producers must indicate a readiness to carry out practices as scheduled over the next three to five years.

Producers must agree to maintain practices for a specified number of years. Producers who fail to maintain practices for the specified life spans are required to refund all or part of the Federal funds provided for installation of the practice.

Farmers or ranchers may enter into pooling agreements to jointly solve mutual conservation problems.

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

To participate, the farmer files his request with the ASC county committee (at the ASCS county office) for ACP cost-sharing. An ACP practice must be approved before the practice is started.

The county committee will notify the applicant by letter that the request for cost-sharing has been approved subject to a determination by SCS, on certain practices, that the practice is feasible. For LTA's, a conservation plan must be developed by a representative of SCS and approved by the Soil and Water Conservation District before final approval by the county ASC committee can be obtained.

After the practice is completed, the farmer certifies to the county office that all installation specifications, technical standards, and any state or local applicable regulations have been met. The farmer pays the total cost of establishing the approved practices and is then reimbursed for the government's share of the cost.

ELIGIBLE PRACTICES

Among practices eligible for cost-sharing assistance under ACP are establishment or improvement of permanent vegetative cover, contour, or strip-cropping systems, and terrace systems; development of springs, seeps and wells; installation of pipelines, storage facilities, and other measures intended to provide erosion control on range or pastureland; installation of water impoundment reservoirs for erosion control, conservation, and environmental and wildlife enhancement; planting trees and shrubs and improving timber stands for protection against wind and water erosion and to protect trees for timber production; and development of new or rehabilitation of existing shallow water areas to support food, habitat and cover for wildlife. (Landowners must establish minimum cover on set-aside acreage without cost-sharing; however, other types of ACP practices, such as terraces or diversions, are eligible for ACP assistance on set-aside acreage.)

For other practices that are or may be available for ACP cost-sharing assistance, agricultural landowners and operators should contact their local ASCS county office.

